Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus* nesting in its Himalayan wintering range: first breeding record for the Indian Subcontinent

JAMES A. EATON and FRANK E. RHEINDT

The Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus* is a little-known Eastern Palaearctic shorebird. Its breeding range is restricted to Japan, the Russian Far East and China north of the Yangtze River and east of Sichuan (Meyer de Schauensee 1984, Cheng 1987, Wiersma 1996, MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000). Recently, the species has also been found breeding south of the Yangtze River in Jiangxi province in 2007 and 2008 (Wilkinson *et al.* 2008, JAE pers. obs.). While Japanese populations are probably sedentary, mainland birds mostly winter to the south of their breeding range in an area extending from eastern Nepal and north-east India to northern Indochina, southern China, South Korea and Japan (Wiersma 1996). The species is reported to breed from mid-April, using '...depressions on sandy ground among pebbles and rocks...' to deposit four eggs (Wiersma 1996, Wilkinson *et al.* 2008). Hayman *et al.* (1986) provided further details on the breeding habitat, indicating that the plovers nest '...mainly on pebble beaches and spits on lakeshores and in stony riverbeds...', while avoiding areas of pure sand or large boulders.

On 31 March and 1 April 2007, JAE, FER and a group of three other observers encountered up to five Long-billed Plovers in an area of shingle bank on the edge of a fast-flowing river and in adjacent fields in Sangti Valley (western Arunachal Pradesh, India) at 1,570 m (27°24′ 21.65″N 92°16′50.45″E). The birds were flushed and relocated as single individuals or in pairs. Later that year, in May, adult birds continued to be seen at the same location (Peter Lobo pers. comm.). The area is well known as a wintering location of the species, so the records were assumed to be of late wintering birds before their departure to the breeding grounds. The following year, however, on 11 April 2008, JAE—leading a Birdtour Asia tour with seven other participants—returned to the area of shingle bank and found two pairs of Long-billed Plover exhibiting territorial behaviour (Figure 1). The birds refused to fly off and instead crouched down when approached closely. One of these two pairs was found to be guarding a group of three pulli that were presumably less than a week old (Figure 2).

This observation confirms breeding for the Long-billed Plover in western Arunachal Pradesh, an area long presumed to be an exclusive wintering ground of the species and more than 1,500 km from the nearest breeding grounds in north-east Sichuan. The phenological and ecological aspects surrounding this breeding record appear to be fairly typical for the species: the nest area was located on a stony riverbed, and the three pulli, which presumably fledged some time in early April, may well have originated from an initial clutch of four eggs. Although breeding in the Sangti Valley was only confirmed for the 2008 season, it is also likely to have occurred at least in 2007 (Peter Lobo and Mario Camici pers. comm.), when adult birds were seen well into May, by which time breeding has thoroughly progressed in their northern breeding grounds.

This breeding record of Long-billed Plover in Arunachal Pradesh raises two interrelated questions. (1) Is breeding in the wintering grounds of north-east India a relatively new phenomenon, e.g. one that has arisen recently as a response to anthropogenic causes such as habitat conversion or climate change? (2) Does this record constitute an isolated instance of breeding on the wintering grounds (involving great geographic separation from the breeding range), or does it reveal the forefront of a genuine breeding range extension that also covers all the intervening areas between the site in question and the northern breeding grounds?

The definite answers to these questions cannot be given on the basis of this sole breeding record and must await

Figure 1. Adult Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus* close to pulli, Sangti Valley, 11 April 2008. (James Eaton)

Figure 2. Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus* pullus, Sangti Valley, 11 April 2008. (James Eaton)

further data from the field. However, the absence of breeding records and the scarcity of non-breeding records of this species from relatively well-visited intervening areas such as western Sichuan, south-east Xizang and north-west Yunnan argue against a broad extension of the breeding range from the north-east, but instead suggest that breeding in Arunachal Pradesh is in geographical isolation from the main breeding range. Similarly, the absence of previous breeding records of this species from the Himalayan wintering grounds, which include areas such as Nepal that have historically received much ornithological attention, strongly indicates that breeding on the wintering grounds has arisen only recently, potentially in response to climate change or anthropogenically induced habitat change.

Instances of long-distance migrants commencing breeding activity in their wintering grounds have been known for decades, most famously exemplified by the White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* breeding in South Africa (Roberts 1941). However, anthropogenically induced climate change has been documented to affect the phenology, physiology and distributions of hundreds of animal and plant species since the 1990s (e.g. Visser *et al.* 1998, Dunn and Winkler 1999, Hughes 2000, Stevenson and Bryant 2000). The Long-billed Plover's nesting habitat is restricted to the vicinity of rivers and lakes—often in the neighbourhood of villages—and nesting birds are conspicuous and easy to find. Therefore, it is exceedingly unlikely that the species has been overlooked as a breeding bird in vast areas of its range for centuries. Instead, breeding in Arunachal Pradesh and potentially in neighbouring areas is probably a recent phenomenon. If so, this geographical extension of breeding activity would fall into a time-frame that is characterised by a global influx in patterns of distributional change in birds and other animals in response to the rising levels of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere (Hughes 2000). It will therefore be important to see if the coming years produce more breeding records of this species from areas that have hitherto been assumed to be outside of its breeding range.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Mario Camici, Geoff Carey, Dave Farrow, Paul Holt, Jesper Hornskov, Krys Kazmierczak and Craig Robson for providing information. Peter Lobo deserves warm thanks for arranging our visit to Arunachal Pradesh and providing information.

REFERENCES

Cheng, T. H. (1987) *A synopsis of the avifauna of China*. Beijing: Science Press.

Dunn, P. O. and Winkler, D. W. (1999) Climate change has affected the breeding date of tree swallows throughout North America. *Proc. Roy. Soc. B* 266: 2487–2490.

Hayman, P., Marchant, J. and Prater, T. (1986) *Shorebirds: an identification guide to the waders of the world*. London: Croom Helm.

Hughes, L. (2000) Biological consequences of global warming: is the signal already apparent? *Trends Ecol. Evol.* 15: 56–61.

MacKinnon, J. and Phillipps, K. (2000) *A field guide to the birds of China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Meyer de Schauensee, R. (1984) *The birds of China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roberts, A. (1941) Notes on some birds of the Cape Province. *Ostrich* 11: 124.

Stevenson, I. R. and Bryant, D. M. (2000) Climate change and constraints on breeding. *Nature* 406: 366–367.

Visser, M. E., van Noordwijk, A. J., Tinbergen, J. M. and Lessells, C. M. (1998) Warmer springs lead to mistimed reproduction in great tits (*Parus major*). *Proc. Roy. Soc. B* 265: 1867–1870.

Wiersma, P. (1996) Family Charadriidae species accounts. Pp.410–442 in. J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott and J. Sargatal, eds. *Handbook of the birds of the world*, 3. Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.

Wilkinson, R., Dowell, S., He, F.-Q. and Lin, J.-S. (2008) Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus* breeding in Jiangxi province, east-central China. *BirdingASIA* 9: 86–87.

James A. Eaton, 17 Keats Avenue, Littleover, Derby DE23 4EE, U.K. Email: jameseaton@birdtourasia.com
Frank E. Rheindt, Schafhohle 4, 74226 Nordheim, Germany Email: frankrheindt@yahoo.com.au

Three new bird records from the Andaman Islands, India

M. A. RAJA MAMANNAN and LALITHA VIJAYAN

The Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal cover 6,408 km², spread over >325 islands and rocks (21 inhabited). During a study of the avifaunal diversity of these islands between 2003 and 2004, we surveyed five major and 52 outer islands, relying on Ali and Ripley (1983), Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak and van Perlo (2000) for identification and information on distribution and status. In the study, we recorded 153 species, including three species new to the archipelago (Vijayan *et al.* 2005). These latter three species, evidently vagrants, are described here.

TICKELL'S BLUE FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa* (*Cyornis*) *tickelliae*

An individual was seen on a *Ficus* species in moist deciduous/semi-evergreen forest near Sonapahar Reservoir, South Andaman (c.11°42′–11°43′N 92°36′–92°38′E) on 19 March 2004 at 08h30. We observed it for c.12 minutes at a distance of 20 m while it foraged in the area. The blue body, orange-rufous throat and breast, prominent white belly, and the sharp *tick tick* vocalisation accompanied by tail-flicking were diagnostic.